

In January 2014, Prime Minister Peter O'Neill and other lawmakers faced allegations of wrongdoing involving \$28 million in government fees paid to a private law firm. Taskforce Sweep, O'Neill's special anticorruption investigation body, first concluded the allegations were unfounded, but later said new evidence supported an arrest warrant for O'Neill. Following this development, O'Neill declared Taskforce Sweep to be politically compromised and disbanded the group in June, putting the police in charge of the investigation. Acting Police Commissioner Geoffrey Vaki was arrested soon afterward by fraud investigators for interfering with the course of justice in relation to the case against O'Neill. O'Neill then dismissed the deputy police commissioner who approved Vaki's arrest and initiated an investigation against Sam Koim, the anticorruption group's director, for alleged mismanagement. The affair inflamed political divisions, and political protests were banned on grounds of avoiding violence.

In July, the National Court reinstated Taskforce Sweep. The government subsequently removed Koim from the payroll and withheld funds for the taskforce, though the group continued to work.

Natural-resource exploitation provides the bulk of government revenue in Papua New Guinea, making the country's economy vulnerable to fluctuations in mineral and energy prices.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Political Rights: 23 / 40 (-1) [Key]

A. Electoral Process: 9 / 12

Voters elect a unicameral, 111-member National Parliament to serve five-year terms. A limited preferential voting system allows voters to choose up to three preferred candidates on their ballots. The governor-general, who represents the United Kingdom's monarch as head of state, formally appoints the prime minister, who leads the majority party or coalition in the legislature.

The 2012 parliamentary elections were generally considered free and fair. The People's National Congress Party (PNC) won 27 seats, independents won 16 seats, the Triumph Heritage Empowerment Party (THE) won 12 seats, and 19 small parties shared the remainder. O'Neill, head of the PNC, was elected prime minister. His PNC-led coalition gives him commanding control of the National Parliament, including approval of a 30-month moratorium on no-confidence motions after an election and more power over the judiciary.

A \$76 million soft loan from China in 2013 will pay for a new biometric voter identification system.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 10 / 16

There are numerous political parties, but political loyalties are driven more by tribal, linguistic, geographic, and personal ties than by party affiliation. Many candidates run as independents and align with parties after they are elected.

A 2005 agreement ended a civil war in Bougainville and provided for an independence referendum to be

held between 2015 and 2020. The Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) launched its civil service in May 2014. Rent for land use and sharing of profits remain challenging issues among the ABG, local landowners, and the government of Papua New Guinea.

C. Functioning of Government: 4 / 12 (–1)

Pervasive corruption and official abuse are the biggest hindrances to development. PNG ranks 145 out of 175 countries and territories in Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index. The prime minister's disbanding of the anticorruption taskforce in June and subsequent manipulation of the investigation against him were major hindrances to recent progress made against corruption. Taskforce Sweep has aggressively pursued lawmakers, top officials, and government agencies to root out abuses. A major case ended in March 2014 with the conviction of a lawmaker for misappropriating \$3.8 million in public funds. Also in March, a national court was created to fast-track hearings for cases of fraud, dishonesty, and corruption.

Civil Liberties: 36 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 12 / 16

Freedom of speech is generally respected. The media provide independent coverage of controversial issues such as alleged police abuse, official corruption, and opposition views. However, the government and politicians have occasionally used media laws and defamation lawsuits to limit critical reporting. The government also restricts media access to the detention center in Manus Island.

Internet use is growing, but high costs and lack of infrastructure limit its spread outside urban centers. In February 2014, a new online news company, PNG Edge, began operation. In April, lawmakers proposed a cybercrime bill that outlaws use of pseudonyms on social media and requires biometric scanning of SIM cards for mobile phones.

In 2013, church leaders spoke out against a lawmaker's proposal to consider banning non-Christian faiths. The predominantly Christian country is home to a 5,000-member Muslim community, which has rapidly grown in recent years.

Academic freedom is generally respected, but the government does not always tolerate criticism. In April, lawmakers threatened to deport Paul Barker, director of a local research institute, for an alleged breach of his work visa. Barker has been a critic of government spending, which has caused contention with the ruling coalition. In 2013, the government ordered schools to replace local vernacular with English in instruction.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 9 / 12

The constitution provides for freedoms of assembly and association, although the government frequently undermines attempts to hold public demonstrations. Marches and demonstrations require 14 days' notice and police approval, which is rarely granted. In June 2014, all public assembly was suspended following O'Neill's arrest, but police allowed peaceful sit-ins to take place. Many civil society groups provide social

services and advocate for women's rights, the environment, and other causes. The government recognizes workers' rights to strike, organize, and engage in collective bargaining. However, the government has been known to impose arbitration in labor disputes before workers had the opportunity to strike.

F. Rule of Law: 7 / 16

The judiciary is generally independent; however, the government has exerted political pressure on the court system in the past. Authorities passed a series of laws in 2012 designed to undermine judicial independence, but these were repealed in 2013. The Supreme Court is the final court of appeal and has jurisdiction on constitutional matters. Shortage of trained judicial personnel is a key cause of lengthy detentions and trial delays. Laypeople sit on village courts to adjudicate minor offenses under customary and statutory law.

Law enforcement officials have been implicated in corruption, unlawful killings, extortion, rape, theft, and brutality, in addition to being largely ineffective in curbing mob violence, tribal warfare, and other crimes. The government plans to double the size of its 5,000-member police force in 2015.

Prison conditions are poor, and the correctional service is understaffed. Prison breaks are common.

After no executions for 50 years, capital punishment was reinstated by the National Parliament in late 2013. In early 2014, a technical team began studying the procedures of other countries with the death penalty to consider how to implement the new law. Thirteen prisoners are currently awaiting execution.

The government plans to expand the military from 1,900 to 10,000 troops, drawing criticism from advocates for prioritizing the military over underfunded health and education projects. Observers also suspect the build-up is intended to safeguard foreign corporate assets in the country rather than to bolster defense or fight piracy, as authorities claim. Papua New Guinea receives aid from China, and a new military agreement with the United States includes logistical support, supplies, and services for military training.

Lack of development in the country exacerbates competition and intensifies tribal rivalries, frequently resulting in violent clashes, injuries, and deaths. Resentment toward the rapid spread of Chinese-owned businesses and their import of Chinese workers has resulted in many violent attacks.

Controversy persists over the country's agreement with Australia regarding asylum seekers. Migrants from third-party countries that reach Australia are sent to a detention center in Papua New Guinea where they are held pending a review of their asylum applications. However, even if granted refugee status, migrants will only be resettled in Papua New Guinea, with no opportunity to return to Australia. Opposition lawmakers challenge the legality of this arrangement, and local authorities and communities have demanded a bigger share of funds from Australia, as well as support for infrastructure projects. Detainees complain about poor living conditions and delays in immigration processing. Their protests turned violent in February, leading to a mass breakout; 35 people escaped, and one person died from a head injury. Guards allegedly used sticks, iron bars, rubber hoses, and other objects to subdue the protesters. A National Court judge ordered an inquiry into the February incident. A leaked report by the Australian contractor managing the facility states that there are daily occurrences of self-harm, suicide attempts, and attacks on guards and personnel. Delayed medical attention left a detainee dead in September. At year's end, there were more than 1,000 detainees. Australia spent approximately \$100 million to build a village for the refugees in the provincial capital of Manus Island.

Same-sex sexual relations are a criminal offense. No laws protect against discrimination or hate crimes.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 8 / 16

Discrimination and violence against women and children are widespread. In a 2013 UN survey, 61 percent of Papua New Guinea men reported to have raped someone at least once. Allegations of sorcery—rooted in superstitions or used as an excuse for personal vendettas—frequently makes women the target of violence. In April 2014, 189 persons were charged with burning 8 people to death.

Papua New Guinea does not meet any of the UN Millennium Development Goals. According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), Papua New Guinea is host to 90 percent of new HIV/AIDS cases in the Pacific. Tuberculosis is widespread. In February 2014, government health facilities began providing free basic health services and treatment for HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and mental health issues.

According to the U.S. State Department's *Trafficking in Persons Report* for the year 2014, Papua New Guinea has not made significant efforts to prevent and prosecute trafficking or assist victims. The report rated PNG as a tier three country, in which both local and foreign victims are trafficked for sex work, child labor, and manual labor. Papua New Guinea is not a party to UN the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

[Full Methodology](#)